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Committee on Information

Report of the Committee on Information on the resumed twenty-first session

1-5 November 1999

Addendum

1. The Committee on Information held its resumed session from 1 to 5 November 1999 to consider the report of the Secretary-General on multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites (A/AC.198/1999/9 and Corr. 1 and 2). In paragraph 35 of draft resolution B entitled "United Nations public information policies and activities", adopted by the Committee by consensus on 14 May 1999, the Secretary-General was requested to further develop his proposals pertaining to option C discussed in his previous report (A/AC.198/1999/6), in a cost effective manner and with a focus on textual content, including appropriate programme budget implications, for consideration by the Committee on Information and other relevant bodies. The new report on the subject (A/AC.198/1999/9 and Corr.1 and 2) offered three sub-options to further develop option C. Sub-option C-3 was the proposal recommended in the report under consideration.

2. The Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information made a statement introducing the report of the Secretary-General. For text of the statement, see the annex attached to the present report. Two delegations, while agreeing that sub-option C-3 seemed to be the best of the alternatives offered under the circumstances of continuing financial restrictions, were of the view that the actual level of usage of the United Nations language sites should not be the criterion for their further development. A delegation stated that the Fifth Committee should continue to consider the question of the enhancement of the Web sites in the six official languages pursuant to resolution 53/208 C of 18 December 1998. One delegation asked for additional details on the resource requirements in the sub-option C-3. Another speaker asked that some of the terminology in this proposal be clarified. One delegation observed that sub-option C-3 was no guarantee of language parity. A speaker, referring to the report of the Secretary-General, asked about the status of a pilot study on the feasibility of distributing high-fidelity United Nations radio programmes over the Internet to areas of the world with advanced bandwidth and technology. Another expressed his appreciation for the newly initiated United Nations News Centre. One delegation suggested that a Web page be developed for the upcoming United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

3. The Under-Secretary-General made a statement in reply to some of the specific questions raised and also provided some additional information as requested. In his reply, he emphasized that when the language versions of the Web site were further developed, this would indeed result in a larger number of accesses to the language sites and decrease the cost per usage of these sites. The Under-Secretary-General stated that the Department viewed "modules" as main thematic areas of action and activities, such as peace and security, economic and social development, human rights, humanitarian assistance and

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environment, while "elements" were specific documents and public information products that better illustrated those thematic categories. As for the actual content of the sites, the Under-Secretary-General stated that the Department would continue to place emphasis on the textual content of the sites in keeping with the views expressed by Member States in this respect. He stated that with regard to the resources, the staffing requirements represented the total staffing needs within the Department of Public Information for the implementation of sub-option C-3. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General, the current arrangement was temporary and could not be sustained in the long run as the current staff had been temporarily redeployed from their regular functions in other parts of the Department.

4. One delegation, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, proposed a text to replace operative paragraph 35 of the Committee's draft resolution B, contained in document A/54/21. Following informal consultations, the Committee met in plenary and decided by consensus to amend draft resolution B on United Nations public information policies and activities by substituting a new operative paragraph 35 in it. The Committee also decided to add a new operative paragraph to draft resolution B concerning the Geneva Diplomatic Community Network. The revised text of draft resolution B is reproduced below:

Draft resolution B

United Nations public information policies and activities

The General Assembly,

Reiterating its decision to consolidate the role of the Committee on Information as its main subsidiary body mandated to make recommendations to it relating to the work of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat,

Concurring with the view of the Secretary-General that public information and communications should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations, and that a culture of communications should permeate all levels of the Organization, as a means of fully informing the peoples of the world of the aims and activities of the United Nations,

1. *Reaffirms* its resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946, in which it established the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat;

2. *Welcomes* Angola, the Republic of Moldova and Solomon Islands to membership in the Committee on Information;

3. *Calls upon* the Secretary-General, in respect of the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, to continue to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 2 of its resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993 and other mandates as established by the General Assembly;

4. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications,[1] and encourages him to continue the reorientation exercise in the area of public information and communications, while stressing the need to take into account the views of Member States, and requests him to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session, in 2000;

5. *Emphasizes* that, through its reorientation, the Department of Public Information should maintain and improve its activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries and, where appropriate, other countries with special needs, including countries in transition, and that such reorientation should contribute to bridging the existing gap between the developing and the developed countries in the crucial field of public information and communications;

6. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005: programme 23, public information,[2] and, emphasizing that the implementation of the broad objectives, as outlined in the proposal, should be in accordance with the objectives set forth in relevant General Assembly resolutions regarding the questions relating to information, requests the Secretary-General to proceed with its submission for consideration by the Committee for Programme and Coordination, in accordance with section I of General Assembly resolution 53/207 of 18 December 1998;

7. *Requests* the Secretary-General to also give a particular focus to educational institutions as key and indispensable partners of the United Nations in its efforts to fully inform the peoples of the world of its aims and activities;

8. *Takes note with appreciation* of the efforts of the Secretary-General to strengthen the public information capacity of the Department of Public

Information for the formation and day-to-day functioning of the information components of peacekeeping and other field operations of the United Nations, and requests the Secretariat to continue to ensure the involvement of the Department of Public Information from the planning stage of such future operations through interdepartmental consultations and coordination with other substantive departments of the Secretariat;

9. *Encourages* the Secretary-General to further strengthen consultative arrangements between the Department of Public Information and other substantive departments in the Secretariat, in particular those dealing with development issues;

10. *Recalls* its resolution 53/22 of 4 November 1998 concerning the designation of the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and encourages the Secretary-General to strengthen the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information with a view to disseminating information on and drawing international attention to the Dialogue among Civilizations and the impact it could have on promoting mutual understanding, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and international cooperation;

11. *Recalls* its resolution 53/202 of 17 December 1998 concerning the designation of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly as the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations and the convening, as an integral part of the Millennium Assembly, of the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, and encourages the Secretary-General to formulate and implement an effective public information strategy in this regard so as to ensure that the Summit will enjoy broad international support;

12. *Emphasizes* that all publications of the Department of Public Information should fulfil an identifiable need, should not duplicate other publications inside the United Nations system and should be produced in a cost-effective manner;

13. *Takes note with appreciation* of the efforts of the Secretary-General to move the Dag Hammarskjöld Library in the direction of a virtual library, and requests him, at the same time, to enrich the stock of books and journals in the Library, including on peace and security as well as development-related issues, in order to ensure that it continues to be a broadly accessible resource for information about the United Nations and its activities;

14. *Urges* the Secretary-General to exert all efforts to ensure that publications and other information services of the Secretariat, including the United Nations Web site, contain comprehensive, objective and equitable information about the issues before the Organization and maintain editorial independence, impartiality, accuracy and full consistency with resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly;

15. *Notes* that the request made to the Secretary-General, in its resolution 53/59 B of 3 December 1998, to ensure full and direct access for the representatives of Member States to the briefings organized at Headquarters by the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General, and to ensure wider outreach of the outcome of such briefings, has not been implemented, and therefore reiterates that request;

16. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that information presented to the media is made available to delegations fully and in a timely fashion;

17. *Reaffirms* the importance attached by Member States to the role of United Nations information centres in effectively and comprehensively disseminating information in all parts of the world, in particular in developing countries and countries in transition, and especially in those countries where there is need for greater understanding about United Nations activities;

18. *Also reaffirms* the importance of all United Nations information centres meeting the primary objectives outlined by the Committee on Information in its report on its ninth session;[3]

19. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme,[4] in which he notes that the objectives of the integration exercise remain valid, and notes his intention to make a concerted effort to address the problems encountered in the implementation of the integration exercise in a number of information centres;

20. *Notes with concern* that, while the co-location of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme has, to some extent, been able to promote the image of the United Nations, the integration of United Nations information centres with field offices

of the Programme has, in general, resulted in a lower level of programme delivery and a narrower range of activities and in cases of relocation of information centres to common premises with the Programme, has frequently resulted in higher maintenance costs and has been suffering from leadership and staff problems and that, to a large extent, the policy of integration has not in all cases achieved its stated objective of performing functions efficiently, effectively and in a cost-effective manner;

21. *Requests* the Secretary-General to carry out a case-by-case review of, and submit his proposals on the functioning of, the integrated centres on a priority basis, in full consultation with the host Governments, and to submit a report during the twenty-second session of the Committee on Information;

22. *Further notes* that the Department of Public Information intends to draft, jointly with the United Nations Development Programme, a set of guidelines indicating the operational framework for the integrated centres, and requests the Secretary-General to report on the guidelines before its implementation to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session;

23. *Reaffirms* the role of the General Assembly in relation to the opening of new United Nations information centres, and invites the Secretary-General to make such recommendations as he may judge necessary regarding the establishment and location of such centres;

24. *Takes note* of the information provided by the Secretary-General in his report concerning the allocation of resources to United Nations information centres in 1998,[5] and calls upon him to continue to study ways and means of rationalizing and effecting equitable disbursement of available resources to all United Nations information centres and to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session;

25. *Welcomes* the action taken by some Member States with regard to providing financial and material support to United Nations information centres in their respective capitals, and invites the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to consult Member States, where appropriate, on the possibility of providing the centres with additional voluntary support on a national basis, bearing in mind that such support should not be a substitute for the full allocation of financial requirements for the United Nations information centres in the context of the programme budget of the United Nations;

26. *Welcomes* the requests of Croatia, Gabon, Guinea, Haiti, Jamaica and Kyrgyzstan for information centres or information components;

27. *Recognizes* the continuing enhanced cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the University for Peace in Costa Rica as a focal point for promoting United Nations activities and disseminating United Nations information materials, and requests the Secretary-General to report on those activities;

28. *Expresses its full support* for wide, accurate, equal and prompt coverage of United Nations activities through the continuation and improvement of United Nations press releases, stresses the importance of having these press releases issued in all official languages of the United Nations, and requests other relevant bodies of the General Assembly to give due consideration to this matter;

29. *Stresses* that radio is one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching media available to the Department of Public Information and an important instrument in United Nations activities, such as development and peacekeeping, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/44 B;

30. *Encourages* further strengthening of the availability of programmes of United Nations Radio, in all available languages, on the United Nations Web site on the Internet;

31. *Requests* the Secretary-General to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 38/82 B of 15 December 1983 with regard to the introduction of full programming in French and Creole in the work programme of the Caribbean Unit of United Nations Radio;

32. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the design and scope of a pilot project for the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations,[6] and requests the Department of Public Information to start, as soon as possible, the implementation of the pilot project through, *inter alia*, contacts with interested Member States and other specialized institutions, with a view to ensuring the assistance necessary for the success of the project, taking into account the need to enhance the

existing resources and services, and further requests the Secretary-General to submit a progress report on the implementation of this project to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session;

33. *Underlines* the continuing importance of using traditional and mass media channels to disseminate information about the United Nations, and encourages the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to continue to take full advantage of recent developments in information technologies, including the Internet, to improve, in a cost-effective manner, the dissemination of information about the United Nations, in accordance with the priorities established by the General Assembly and taking into account the linguistic diversity of the Organization;

34. *Takes note* of efforts by some United Nations information centres to establish their own Web pages in local languages, and recommends the Department of Public Information to encourage other information centres to develop Web pages in the respective local languages of host countries;

35. *Takes note with appreciation*, with reference to the report of the Secretary-General on the continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites[7] and the report of the Secretary-General on the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites,[8] of the efforts of the Secretary-General to develop and enhance the United Nations Web sites in all the official languages of the Organization, requests him to pursue these efforts and to continue to develop proposals for consideration by the Committee at its next session, having in mind the goal of achieving modular parity between official languages, and stressing that this goal should be achieved in a cost-effective manner and with a focus on textual content;

36. *Welcomes* the establishment of the Geneva Diplomatic Community Network, which has improved the dissemination of information among the permanent missions, the United Nations Office at Geneva and the other international organizations based in Geneva, and requests the Secretary-General to continue providing his support to this important programme;

37. *Expresses its appreciation* for the ongoing programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and countries in transition conducted by the Department of Public Information, and calls for its further expansion to include a larger number of trainees from developing countries;

38. *Acknowledges* the important work carried out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and its collaboration with news agencies and broadcasting organizations in developing countries in disseminating information on priority issues;

39. *Requests* the Department of Public Information to continue to ensure the greatest possible access for United Nations guided tours, as well as to ensure that displays in public areas are kept as informative, up-to-date, relevant and technologically innovative as possible;

40. *Recalls* its resolutions concerning the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, in particular resolutions 51/138 B of 13 December 1996 and 52/172 of 16 December 1997, and encourages the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with the countries concerned and with the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to continue to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness of the consequences of that disaster;

41. *Recalls also* its resolution 53/1 H of 16 November 1998, concerning international cooperation for the human and ecological rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan affected by nuclear tests, and encourages the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness of the problems and needs of the Semipalatinsk region;

42. *Recalls* its resolution 53/59 of 3 December 1998 and urges the Department of Public Information to take the necessary measures, through the provision of relevant and objective information, with a view to achieving the major objectives set forth in the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa;[9]

43. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session, in 2000, and to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session, in 2000, on the activities of the Department of Public Information and on the

implementation of the recommendations contained in the present resolution;

44. *Requests* the Committee on Information to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session;

45. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-fifth session the item entitled "Questions relating to information".

5. The delegation of Egypt inquired about the result of consultations that were to be undertaken with regard to the implementation of its proposal as contained in paragraphs 52 and 53 of the Committee's report (A/54/21). In his explanation, the Chairman pointed to the need to identify one topic for consideration by the Committee and welcomed any suggestions from delegations to that effect. The representative of Egypt reiterated the relevance of the proposal and the importance of achieving progress before the next session of the Committee; he also explained that it was meant to be implemented within the context of the Working Group of the Committee. The Chairman said that he shared this understanding and would continue his consultations towards that end.

6. The Chairman proposed that, since the report of the Committee on Information (A/54/21) had already been transmitted to the General Assembly, the report of the resumed session should take the form of an addendum. In his closing remarks, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information assured the Committee that the Department would continue its efforts with regard to the United Nations Web sites with the Committee's guidance.

7. At the resumed session, the Chairman informed the Committee that Liberia had requested membership in the Committee and, accordingly, the Committee decided to amend the draft decision adopted by consensus by the Committee on 14 May 1999, contained in paragraph 49 of its report to the General Assembly (A/54/21), to read as follows:

Draft decision

Increase in the membership of the Committee on Information

The General Assembly decides to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 93 to 95 members and to appoint Liberia and Mozambique as members of the Committee on Information.

Notes

[1] A/AC.198/1999/2.

[2] A/AC.198/1999/8.

[3] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/42/21), sect. III.D, recommendation 36.

[4] A/AC.198/1999/3.

[5] A/AC.198/1999/4.

[6] A/AC.198/1999/5.

[7] A/AC.198/1999/6.

[8] A/AC.198/1999/9 and Corr.1 and 2.

[9] A/52/871-S/1998/318.

Annex

Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information at the opening of the resumed twenty-first session of the Committee on Information

I should like first of all to express my appreciation to you and to the members of the Committee for the work accomplished during the first part of the twenty-first session, held from 3 to 14 May 1999. The basis for our resumed session was created through the Committee's careful deliberations in May. I am confident that the Committee will continue to provide valuable guidance on our future public information activities, including those involving the United Nations Web site.

I would like to recall that in his report to the Committee on Information, dated 10 April 1999, entitled "Reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications" (A/AC.198/1999/2), the Secretary-General outlined the main elements of the new orientation of the activities of the Department of Public Information, including the utilization of the Internet, a medium which is rapidly evolving into a significant communications tool for users around the world.

On the threshold of the new millennium, we face the issue of the United Nations presence on the Internet, which will have tremendous ramifications for the Organization in the twenty-first century. Today, organizations everywhere are taking advantage of the timeliness and cost-effectiveness of the Internet to get their messages out. Internet-provided health services and distance education are being explored, especially with a view towards their application in developing countries.

Today, the presence of the United Nations on the Internet is an essential, strategic tool to project and enhance the image of the Organization in all parts of the world, especially through the rapid delivery of news that we are now providing via our just-initiated United Nations News Centre. The Internet has truly become a universal network, as practically every country in the world now has some degree of connectivity.

There is no doubt that the Internet has enhanced the efficiency and timeliness of United Nations public information activities. Recently, the presentation of information about the Organization has taken on new dimensions with the addition of audio-visual elements to the Web repertoire. In this regard, let me stress that the audio-visual Web sites build on material currently available as taped television or radio programmes.

It is also important to point out that the development of the United Nations Web site has not been carried out at the expense of the delivery of traditional media products. In many cases, the United Nations Web site has made it possible to deliver traditional media products more effectively to a wider audience at a much faster pace than previously. For example, our press releases are posted on the Web site before they are available in print.

As we begin our deliberations today, we must acknowledge the enormous potential of the Internet for the Organization. We must also concede that we cannot today foresee all the possibilities which lie ahead through the use of the Internet. However, we must prepare to plan for a future in which the Internet will play a substantial role.

Since the launch of the United Nations Web site as a pilot project in June 1995, the Department has struggled to develop, maintain and update the site within existing resources. This has included the temporary redeployment of staff from within the Department. In order to exploit its full potential, and indeed, in order to maintain what has already been created in the official languages, we must formalize the temporary arrangements and give the United Nations Web site the status of a regular programmed activity. At the time of the formulation of the medium-term plan for the period 1996-2001 there were no means to foresee the advent of the United Nations Web site. It was therefore not included in the programme budgets for the biennia 1996-1997 and 1998-1999. As a result, the current United Nations Web site operation is not a budgeted activity of the Department. The resource requirements for the strengthening of the United Nations Web site activities in the other official languages and its further development would be in addition to the 2000-2001 budget proposals for programme 23, Public Information.

The General Assembly, in its resolution 53/208 C of 18 December 1998, stressed "the need for the continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites, with a view to achieving equal treatment of the six official languages on those Web sites".

In response to this resolution, a report was presented to this Committee at the first part of its twenty-first session in May 1999 and to the Committee on Conferences at its substantive session, held from 30 August to 1 September

1999. The report outlined three proposals. The first would ensure full parity among all Web sites in official languages by the end of 2001. The second would achieve the same objective over a longer period of time. And the third would seek to place elements or modules in each of the languages on the Web site, in correlation with the level of usage and the funding made available for this purpose.

In draft resolution B, adopted by consensus on 14 May 1999, this Committee requested a further elaboration of the third proposal, that is option C, in a cost-effective manner, and with a focus on textual content, including appropriate programme budget implications, for consideration by this Committee and other relevant bodies. The report before you is being submitted in response to this request.

Current data show that, on 20 October 1999, for example, the United Nations Web site registered over 959,000 accesses. This translates to approximately 523 accesses per minute, or over five million per week. On the average, some 94 per cent of all accesses are for the site in English; 2.65 per cent are for the French and 1.9 per cent of the Spanish site. The Arabic, Chinese and Russian language portions each register about half a percentage of the total number of accesses to the United Nations Web site. At first glance, this might mean that even though production costs may be the same for each language, costs per access would be extremely high for the less used sites. On the other hand, once the language sites other than English are better developed, they will obviously draw additional users, thereby significantly diminishing costs per access.

The current upward trend for the use of the Internet is reflected in a new report by the International Telecommunication Union, entitled "Challenges to the network, Internet for development". The report describes the figures for Internet growth around the world as impressive. However, the price of Internet access and the shortage of infrastructure, notably of telephone lines, are the main reasons for relatively low numbers of Internet accesses in the developing world, according to the International Telecommunication Union.

It is the goal of the Department to make available on the United Nations Web site as much information on the United Nations as possible in all six languages, as the need grows. The report before you presents three proposals as sub-options under option C, outlined in the earlier report. Sub-option C-1 would allow for the translation and presentation of the contents of the current United Nations Web site in all official languages on an incremental basis with no time frame for achieving full parity.

Under sub-option C-2, only selected basic modules, including the audio-visual module, would be translated and made available on the Web site on an ongoing basis. The content-providing offices would decide upon these modules based on guidance from Member States. Both sub-options 1 and 2 require that a feasibility study be undertaken to determine the cost of expanding the Web site in all six languages.

Sub-option C-3, in the view of the Secretary-General, would provide a sound foundation for the current ad hoc maintenance and enhancement of activities of the Web site. It would offer content in other languages, related to the level of usage of the Web site in those languages. New modules would be made available on the basis of ongoing monitoring of the usage level, as it increases.

Under sub-option C-3, the current ad hoc activities relating to the maintenance and enhancement of the Web site would be established on a firm and realistic basis laying a solid foundation for the United Nations Internet operation as a whole for the biennium 2000-2001.

In addition, the Committee might also wish to take into account paragraph 47 of the report of the Secretary-General concerning the request of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions relating to a Secretariat-wide plan for the development of a United Nations Web site, which would entail a feasibility study as outlined in sub-options C-1 and C-2.

According to the report before you, the basic staffing needs for the Department of Public Information, as outlined in annex III, would represent approximately one half of the resource requirements. This core capacity would be utilized to build on the existing structures and gradually add new material in all official languages to the Web site. The Department is working towards a digital multimedia management system, that will facilitate easier and faster online searches and downloading of photographs, audio files and textual material. Such a system will optimize the operations of the radio and television studios, which will be upgraded with digital facilities to meet the industry-wide conversion to the new technology.

The estimated biennial cost, if sub-option C-3 were chosen, would be US$ 13,522,450, as detailed in annexes I, II and III of the report of the Secretary-General. Accordingly, as paragraph 41 of that report indicates, should the Committee decide to choose sub-option C-3, an additional allocation in that amount would be required under section 23, Public Information, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.

During the first part of the Committee's session in May, many speakers commended the United Nations Web site, and a number of delegations made suggestions to make it more user-friendly. The Department attaches great importance to providing materials on the United Nations Web site that live up to the highest standards of design, information content, user-friendliness, timeliness and relevance. However, the current operation is stretched to the limit, working on an ad hoc basis to maintain the current site and to keep up with growing demands for upgrades, innovations and development of multilingual pages. Our present approach is severely under-resourced and unsustainable in the longer term.

So far, six Professional and five General Service staff members have been redeployed from within the Department with their posts to work exclusively on Web-related activities. However, it has not been possible to dedicate the required number of posts for the maintenance and development of sites in all official languages without seriously compromising the Department's ability to carry out its mandated activities. Developing and maintaining material on the United Nations Web site is a shared responsibility within the Department of Public Information, with staff from all areas of the Department, including those who are located away from Headquarters, contributing to this effort. Staff working in the thematic and publications areas and specializing in coverage of the Organization's activities make a significant contribution to the Web site's content and timeliness. As part of the ongoing reorientation of the work of the Department, new sites have been added, including the United Nations News Centre Web site, the Civil Society Web site, the United Nations and Business Web site and, most recently, the new Web site for the Millennium Assembly. I am also pleased to note that currently 24 United Nations information centres around the world have established their own Web pages in official and local languages, bringing the concerns of the United Nations into the national context.

While I have largely focused on the opportunities and challenges presented by the Internet, I think it is important to emphasize the indispensability of traditional media in the activities of the Department. Be it print, radio or television, the Department's traditional media products continue to reach significant and growing audiences around the globe in their own right. In the context of the Internet, these traditional products form the essential basis of the content of our Web site. We are therefore striving to strike a balance between the need to maintain our capacity to produce competitive print, radio and television products, while, at the same time, enhancing our presence on the Internet. In this regard, I would like to emphasize that the Department is giving high priority to utilizing new information technologies to improve the production and dissemination of information materials for traditional media.

Many United Nations information centres, regional commissions, programmes, funds and specialized agencies and other important partners already use the Internet to distribute information more effectively and to wider audiences around the world. Through the use of the United Nations Web site, there is also a vast potential for developing effective local distribution and promotion of United Nations radio, television and print materials. Development of local printing and translation services for United Nations publications through the Internet, is a possibility to be considered.

As I mentioned earlier, the Department of Public Information has absorbed the initial development and ongoing maintenance and enhancement costs for the United Nations Web site from within existing resources. Any further expansion towards achieving linguistic balance would require a significant level of additional investment over and above the resources required for the implementation of current mandates. Such a secure and sustained budgetary foundation would enable the effective overall planning for the United Nations Web site.

The report before you today recommends a solid basis for a sound United Nations presence on the Internet with appropriate budgetary allocations for the continuation and development of the United Nations Web site operation. At the threshold of the twenty-first century, we must provide a firm and realistic base for the future. We therefore recommend that sub-option C-3 be pursued to establish the needed structure for the Web site's future expansion.

In closing, I wish to convey to you my appreciation for the continued support of the Committee. I look forward to hearing the views of Member States during this session and the result of your deliberations, which will provide us with guidance in formulating and implementing our future public information activities.